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GROWING WITH THE BIBLE

by
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DEDICATION:

To Michael, Andrew, Patrick, Tara and Steve Mc Gown,
good friends and storylovers.

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ISBN 0-940754-36-3
EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES, INC.
2861-C Saturn Street
Brea, California 92621

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible is an ancient, adult, oriental book. Why, then, do we expect children, especially young children, to understand its message?

I see two reasons for some adults' panic: First, many adults have only recently discovered the power of God's Story, the Bible, and want to share their enthusiasm with the children in their care.

Second, some adults, confused before the mystery of God's "Word," hope that children will understand more readily by hearing its words early. Children, however, do not hear the Story as adults do because they think and feel as children, not as adults. All persons hear a story, made up of words, which are symbols, in their own way, from their own perspective, needs, expectations, and experiences, and each person searches for, and struggles with, his or her own faith. Each one encounters God on his or her own path, with his or her own light. There is an old Jewish story that speaks of this: The student, coming to his rabbi, said, "During the time I devote to my studies I feel light and life, but when I close the books, it is gone. What can I do?"

The rabbi replied, "That is like a man walking in the night without a lamp, who meets another with a light and they walk together, but when they come to the crossing and their paths diverge, the first gropes his way in the dark, but if a man carries his own light, he need never fear the darkness."

Children love stories and children have wonderful imaginations. The Bible survived because it is God's living word. Through the centuries women and men have adapted God's story, hearing God's word in their own personal, contemporary circumstances. They have welcomed the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into the lifeless words on the page, for there is power and imagination in the story.

Flannery O'Connor wrote in "The Fiction Writer and His country" in Granville Hicks' *The Living Novel*: "St. Cyril of Jerusalem in constructing catechumens, wrote, 'The dragon sits by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is

necessary to pass by the dragon.' No matter what form the dragon may take, it is of this mysterious passage past him, or into his jaw, that stories of any depth will be concerned to tell, and this being the case, it requires considerable courage at any time, in any country, not to turn away from the storyteller."

The biblical story is heard on many different levels. The story presents possibility. It helps us hope and cope. Children, too, have needs and fears and the biblical story, God's Story, is God's word of love. "I will be with you." "Love one another as I have loved you" it says.

Young and old, all persons, need to hear and know God's love. So we tell the story, trust the imagination, and share our love. We adapt its message to the ears of the hearer. We tell stories about God to show the possibilities of a relationship with God, and who is to judge which of us comes closest to God? Children think concretely.

A humble, dirty shepherd called to God each day, offering to comb his hair, wash his robe, and kiss his hand. Then he always left God a cup of milk. When Moses learned this, he called the man a blasphemer. "God is a spirit," he cried. "He does not want your cup of milk."

The man departed, sorrowing.

Then God admonished Moses. "You have driven away a worshipper from the closest to Me he could approach. And besides, I enjoyed that cup of milk."

These stories, then, are the adaptations of **The Story**. Hold the Bible as you read or tell the stories so young children can see and touch the book and one day read its words for themselves because of your enthusiasm and your sharing of God's story.

OLD TESTAMENT

CREATION

Genesis 1

A long time ago, longer than anyone can remember, God planned the world. "I will make an earth where food will grow, a sun to warm the earth, and clouds with rain to water the earth. And God saw that it was good!

"I will plan for animals, big animals and little animals, fast animals and slow animals," thought God. And God saw that it was good!

"Best of all, I will plan people, tiny babies that grow into strong boys and girls, and good food to keep them well, and I will live with them forever."

And God did and it was good!

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank for you for your world, for the sun and the rain, for animals and families, and especially for your love and promise to be with us always. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What do you like best about God's world?
- How can you tell God that?
- Would you change anything about God's world?
- How can you help take care of God's world?

TO DO:

Children enjoy participation in stories. Have pictures for them to hold and show, as you name the things God created, such as "earth, sun, clouds, animals (big, little, fast, slow), people (babies, boys and girls), food, and a church.





ADAM AND EVE AND THE PEAR TREE

Based on Genesis 3:1-24

"Look at the pear tree!" Mother cried.

John looked up at the small pear tree they had planted in the backyard. It was covered with tiny green pears.

"They are not ready to eat, but it is exciting to watch them grow," said Father. "Don't pick or eat them yet."

John agreed, as he ran out of the yard to Billy's house.

Just before lunch the boys returned. "Hey, look at the little apples," cried Billy.

"They're pears," said John.

"Let's eat one," Billy suggested.

"No, my dad said not to eat them," John said, as he went into the house to get his new truck to show Billy.

When John returned, Billy was eating a pear. "Have one," he invited John. "They're good."

"No. . ." John began, remembering what his father and mother had told him. Then he decided he could take one bite and he did. The pear was hard but tasty. John ate the whole pear and the boys hid the cores under an empty flower pot before they went home for lunch.

John was not hungry that noon. As a matter-of-fact, he didn't feel well. As a matter-of-fact he went to his room to lie down.

"Don't forget the birthday party," his mother reminded him. John had been invited to Billy's birthday party that afternoon.

John felt so badly, he fell asleep and forgot all about the party.

That evening, after dinner, when it was quiet, and John's stomach ache was gone, Mother asked, "Why did you eat the pear, John?"

"I didn't. . ." John began, knowing he had disobeyed. "How did you know?"

"I found two pear cores under a flower pot this afternoon," his mother replied.

"It was Billy's fault. He. . ."

Mother and Father began to laugh. John wondered why and what they were going to do.

"There is a story in the Bible about Adam and Eve who were told not to eat the fruit from one of the trees in the garden where they lived, and they did."

"What happened?" John wanted to know.

"They had to leave the beautiful garden," Father replied.

"It was just like missing a party," added his mother.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for parents and people who help us learn Your will and Your way, and especially Your love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did John's parents tell him not to eat the pear?
- What happened?
- Recall an incident when you were a child and disobeyed. Share what happened.
- How is "Leaving the garden" like missing a birthday party?

TO DO:

Have a family council in which everyone has an opportunity to talk about their appreciations and their gripes. Encourage suggestions for solutions and choose one to try. Schedule another council time to evaluate whether the solution is working.



NOAH AND THE FLOOD

Genesis 6-8

Encourage the children to participate with sound and movement in the following story: Big (spread arms), good (clap hands), bad (booo!), hammer (bang, bang), saw (buzz, buzz), rain (pitter pat, pitter pat).

"Noah," said God, "my people have been bad (*booo!*) so I am going to send some rain (*pitter pat, pitter pat*) and some more rain (*pitter pat, pitter pat*) to make a flood. You have been good (*clap hands*) so get your hammer (*bang, bang*) and your saw (*buzz, buzz*) and build a big (*spread arms*) boat."

Noah trusted God and got his *hammer* and his *saw* and built a *big* boat.



"Noah," said God, "I want you to take two pigs (*oink, oink*), two cows (*moo, moo*), two sheep (*baah, baah*), two lions (*grrr*), two cats (*meow, meow*), two dogs (*woof, woof*), and two birds (*tweet, tweet*) and when you are all in the boat, it will *rain* and *rain* and *rain*."

Then it began to *rain* and *rain* and *rain* and there was a flood. When the land was dry again, God sent a rainbow in the sky as His promise "I will always be with you."

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for the stories in the Bible. Thank You for the gift of water without which there would be no life. Thank You for life. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What are some of the ways we use water?
- What is your favorite animal?
- Do you have pet?
- Why did Noah build a big boat?

TO DO:

Fill a tub of water for wading if it is warm enough for outdoor play. For indoor play add soap flakes and a rotary beater.

ABRAHAM AND LOT

Genesis 13:5-12

"It's mine!"

"No, it's mine!"

"No, it's not. It belongs to my master!"

"It is not your master's. It belongs to my master!"

Abraham's men were fighting. The fighting with words became a fight with fists.

As they were fighting, they could not work. Abraham's men and Lot's men were shepherds. They took care of sheep.

As they were fighting, the sheep wandered off alone.

"Where are my sheep?" Abraham asked his men when they returned that evening.

"We were fighting with Lot's men over the land and the sheep wandered off. It wasn't our fault."

"Your job is to take care of my sheep. Let me worry about the land," Abraham replied.

That evening, Lot asked his men the same question, "Where are my sheep?"

"We were fighting with Abraham's men over the land and the sheep wandered off. It wasn't our fault."

"Your job is to take care of the sheep. I will argue with Abraham," said Lot.

"Lot, there is enough land for both of us," Abraham said. "We will divide and share the land and you may choose first."

Lot chose, the men went back to their work, and the sheep returned to their masters.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for friends that love, for minds that think, for words that help. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why were the men fighting?
- Have you ever had a word fight?
- Have you ever had a fist fight?
- What happened?
- What did Abraham do in the story?

TO DO:

Talk about angry feelings that all people have and of helpful ways to express them. Some people shout, some stamp their feet, some take long walks, and some pound play dough or pillows. There are good ways for feelings to come out. Help the child express his or her feelings with words. "Talking out" feelings helps children think as well as feel. The adult's response to the child's angry feelings is the model the child may choose to imitate.





ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Genesis 22

"Grandfather, why do we kill animals and burn them on the altar?" Caleb asked, sniffing the delicious smell of burning meat. Caleb leaned against his grandfather's arm, ready to listen to his story, for Grandfather always told Caleb stories to explain what he meant.

"It is a sacrifice to God," his grandfather replied. "We burn away our wrongs this way and say 'thank you, God' for God's forgiveness and goodness to us."

"But, Grandfather, the people in the next land, not only sacrifice their animals but their children. We do not sacrifice children, and I'm glad," added Caleb with a smile.

"I will answer your question, Caleb with a story, the story of Abraham, our father, and Isaac, his son."

This is Grandfather's story that is in our Bible.

"Abraham," God said, "Leave your land and your friends and these strange statues they worship. I am sending you to a new land where you will be the father of many people, my people."

Abraham was not eager to leave his home or his friends or his work, but he did as God told him.

"Abraham," God said, when Abraham had traveled a long way from home and put up his tent in a new land, "Abraham, you will have a son and through him, you will be the father of my people."

Abraham was too old to have a son and Sarah, his wife, was too old to have a son, but Abraham believed what God told him, and Abraham and Sarah did have a son and they called him Isaac. Isaac means "laughter."

Abraham and Sarah and Isaac were full of laughter and happiness and joy.

Then God spoke to Abraham again, many years later. "Abraham, take you son Isaac, your only son, and give him back to me as a sacrifice to prove your love."

Abraham did not want to give God his son. He loved him dearly. Isaac was to be the way Abraham would be the father of God's people, but Abraham trusted God and obeyed and did what God told him to do.

"Abraham," God said again, seeing Abraham obeying him, "take your son Isaac from the altar, for I have seen your love for me and I return your son to you."

Again Abraham did as God told him. Then he looked around and found an animal to sacrifice to God instead."

Grandfather finished his story. "From that day, Caleb, we, the Hebrews, have sacrificed animals," Grandfather said, "for Abraham taught us that God is a God who loves."

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Your love for people. May we give You love and live for You. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is an altar?
- When Abraham lived, how did people cook their food?
- Why do we call Abraham a man of "trust"?
- What does it mean to trust God?

TO DO:

Visit the sanctuary and look at and talk about the altar. What do we put on the altar? Why? Play a trust game. Blindfold or ask the child to close his or her eyes and let him or her fall backwards into your arms. If the children are too young to want to do this, lead them around the room, talking about how it feels to "trust" someone and why he or she does trust you.



ESAU AND JACOB

Genesis 25:20-34, 27:1-41

"Father likes you best!" Jacob told his brother Esau.

"Mother likes you best!" Esau replied to his brother Jacob.

It was true. Esau was his father's favorite son because he liked to be with his father. Jacob, his brother, was his mother's favorite son, because he liked to be with his mother.

Esau would hunt with his father and help him in the fields. He liked to be outside, doing.

Jacob would talk with his mother and help her cook the evening meal. He liked to be inside, thinking.





One day, when the father was very old and blind and sick, he said, "Esau, go and hunt me an animal so that I can eat the meat and bless you." Esau was the oldest, so he was to receive the blessing from his father.

Esau did as his father said. He did not know, however, that his mother had been listening.

"Jacob, Jacob," whispered his mother. "Esau is hunting. When he returns, he will receive his father's blessing. I have a plan."

Jacob listened to his mother's plan. This was the plan: Because Esau was covered with hair, Jacob put on animal skins in order to feel hairy, as his brother did, because his father could not see. The animal skins made him feel like Esau, or Hairy, as he could be called. The animal skins made him smell like Hairy, and Grabby, as he could be called, took the meat to his father which his mother had prepared.

"Who are you?" the father asked.

Jacob lied. "I am Hairy."

"You feel like Hairy. You smell like Hairy. You even sound like Hairy," and the father gave Grabby the blessing that was meant for Hairy.

PRAYER:

Dear God, we thank You for stories in the Bible that tell us who we are. We can understand Grabby because all of us are like Grabby sometimes. Help us to love one another, however, as Jesus did. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why do you think this story is in the Bible?
- Have you ever thought that a brother or sister was your father or mother's favorite?
- Do they think that you are a "favorite"?
- Have you ever felt forgotten or that someone had wronged you?
- Has anyone ever taken something from you, as Grabby did?
- What did you do?
- How do you think this story should end?

TO DO:

Talk about feelings. Have a "family council" and let everyone tell about their feelings when they are sad, or hurt, or mad, or wanting what someone else has. Ask for possible suggestions for a solution. Role play different situations that express these different feelings.

JOSEPH'S COAT

Genesis 37

It was yellow. It was blue. It was green and red and brown and white. It was the most beautiful coat Joseph had ever seen! "Is it mine? Is it for me?" Joseph took the coat from his father and put it on.

"Look how beautiful it is!" Joseph said to his brother. "Have you ever seen a more beautiful coat? I'll bet that you wish you had one just like it."

Joseph was right. It was a beautiful coat. His brothers had never seen a more beautiful coat, and yes, his brothers wished they had ones just like it. They were angry that they did not have a coat, as well.

"Why does Joseph get a new coat?" they asked each other. "Why does Father love Joseph more than us? It's not fair!"

It was yellow. It was blue. It was green and red and brown and white. It was a beautiful coat. Joseph bragged about his coat. Joseph did not share his coat with his brothers. It was a beautiful coat but it separated Joseph from his brothers.

PRAYER:

Dear God, when we have something new, we are glad and we want others to be glad with us. Help us remember how they feel and help us share what we have with others. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why was Joseph happy?
- Do you have something that makes you happy?
- Who gave it to you?
- Why did they give it to you?
- Why were Joseph's brothers sad?
- Have you ever wanted what someone else had?
- What did you do?

TO DO:

Talk about feelings of jealousy and gladness as feelings that everyone has. Fill glass salt shakers with powdered tempera paints of yellow, red, blue and black. Let the children express their feelings through fingerpainting.





JOSEPH'S BROTHERS

Genesis 37:1-36

"I want it! I want what Joseph has," thought Joseph's brother, when he saw the new coat his father had given Joseph.

"Father likes Joseph better than he likes me," thought the second brother.

"Joseph thinks he's better than the rest of us," thought the third brother.

"Joseph got a beautiful coat. Let's get even!" said the fourth brother.

All of Joseph's ten brothers were jealous. All of Joseph's ten brothers were angry with Joseph. "Let's take Joseph's coat," they planned one day when they were far from home, taking care of their sheep.

"Let's put Joseph in a pit," they planned. "Father will never know."

"No, let's send Joseph far away, where we won't have to hear his bragging anymore," they planned.

The ten brothers sold Joseph and told their father that he was dead. The father was very sad. The brothers had a plan to get even with Joseph, but God had a different plan.

PRAYER:

Dear God, when we are angry, we want to "get even." Help us to love and understand even when we are hurt or angry. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why were Joseph's brothers angry?
- Do you think that it was fair that Joseph had a new coat and they didn't?
- What did they do?
- What was their plan?
- What do you think God's plan was?

TO DO:

Talk about good ways to show angry or hurt feelings. Recall a specific time when you remember that another child was angry at you or you at the other child and talk about it.

THE DREAMS

Genesis 40-41

I have had a dream. Tell me what it means," the king asked his wise men.

No one knew what the dream meant. The wise men shook their heads. They did not know.

When the wise men left the king, one of his servants bowed before him. "Great king, I know a man who can tell you what your dreams mean."

"Who is he?" the king asked.

"His name is Joseph. He is in prison."

"Bring him to me," the king commanded.

When they brought Joseph to the king, the king told him his dreams.

"My God has told me what your dreams mean," said Joseph. "They are a warning. There will be seven years when the fields are full of food. Then there will be seven years when there will be no food. Therefore, we must plan to save food from the first seven years."

"Joseph, I will put you in charge!" the king declared.

Joseph was taken from prison and given expensive food and clothing and a palace of his own, and he became an important person. Joseph's brothers had sold him as a slave, but God had another plan.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help us to learn to trust Your love and not our own wants and wishes. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

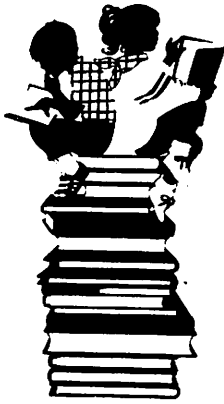
FOR DISCUSSION:

- Do you think Joseph prayed while he was in prison?
- What do you think he said?
- What was God's plan for Joseph?
- Does God have a plan for each of us?

TO DO:

Talk together about prayer. Ask the children who would like to pray to do so.





GOD'S PLAN

Genesis 42-48

"I'm hungry," Benjamin said.

"We are all hungry," said his ten older brothers. "There is no food."

"There is no food in the whole land," their father explained.

The family was hungry. For seven years the fields had been fat with food. Now the fields were empty and the family was hungry. There was no food.

"You must go to Egypt where they have saved food during the seven good years," the father told his ten sons.

The ten brothers did as their father told them. They traveled far, far away to Egypt. They went to the king's palace to buy food.

The brothers bowed before the man who could sell them the food they needed. "What do you want?" the man asked. It was their brother, Joseph, but they did not recognize him, and Joseph kept it a secret.

The next time the brothers returned, Joseph could not keep his secret any longer. "I am Joseph, your brother," he said.

The brothers were afraid. They had put Joseph in a pit and had sold him. Would Joseph put them in a pit or sell them?

"I love and forgive you," Joseph said, hugging his brothers with great joy. "You planned evil, but God plans good."

Joseph loved his brothers, as God had planned.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for families that love and care for one another. Thank You for the story of Joseph and his brothers and for Your plan of love for all of us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why were the brothers hungry?
- What did they do?
- Why did Joseph have a secret?
- What was his secret?
- Why did Joseph love and forgive his brothers?
- What was God's plan?

- Does God have a plan for each of us?

TO DO:

Plan a treat with the children for someone else. Listen to their ideas.

THE BABY MOSES

Exodus 2:1-10

"We must hide the baby to keep him safe, Miriam. Babies are important, even if the wicked king does not think so."

Miriam and her mother hid the baby because the wicked king hated the Hebrews, Miriam's people.

"I will make a basket that will float on the water. We will hide the baby in the basket and put the basket in the tall plants in the water," the mother planned. "You must stay near the basket to see that the baby is safe."

Miriam hid and watched as her mother suggested.

One day an Egyptian princess came to the water to take a bath. She saw the basket in the water. "It's a baby," she said with love.

"Shall I find you a nurse to take care of the baby?" Miriam said, coming out of her hiding place.

"Yes," the princess replied. "Take care of the baby until he is old enough to come to the palace to live with me. He shall be my son and I will call him 'Moses' because I drew him out of the water."

The baby was safe. Miriam found her mother and told her all that had happened. Together they thanked God.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Your plan for babies to be safe and to grow. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Where was Moses hidden?
- Who found Moses?
- What does the name mean?





TO DO:

Visit and play with a baby. Sing or talk to the baby while you play.

THE BURNING BUSH

Exodus 3

"It's burning!" Moses said aloud, looking at the bush burning. Moses was talking to himself because there was no one there but his sheep.

Moses shook his head. "It's burning but it's not burning up the bush. I don't understand. I think I'll go home!"

"Moses!" Moses thought he heard the bush say.

"I know I'll go home," said Moses.

"Moses, I am God! Take off your shoes. You are standing on holy ground."

Moses threw himself on the ground and covered his eyes. He was afraid.

"I have heard my people pray. They need my help," said God. "I will send you to the king of Egypt to tell him to let my people go."

"He will not listen to me, God," said Moses.

"He will listen to you, Moses, because I will be with you."

Moses took his sheep home, for he had a new job to do.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for the wonders in Your world, for life in plants, and animals, and people. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Tell the story in your own words.

TO DO:

Take a visit to a pond to feed the ducks. Talk together about the wonder of water, of color, of life, and especially of people who love God and one another.

MOSES AND THE KING

Exodus 3:7-8; 5:1-2; 13:7-22

"Let my people go!" Moses said to the powerful king of Egypt.

The king looked at Moses with surprise. "Who are your people?"

"My people are the Hebrews, your slaves, and the people of God," said Moses.

"Then who are you, a slave, to tell me, the master, the king, what to do?" the king replied with anger.

"God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is my king. God has sent me to free his people," Moses told the king.

"Get out of here and do not return." The king was becoming more and more angry. "I will not let your people go!"

Moses left the king, but he did not give up. Soon he returned to the king. "Let my people go," he demanded.

"Get out of my sight!" The king was not used to having people disobey him.

Moses left the king, but he did not give up. Again Moses returned to the king. "Now God is angry. God wants his people free!" Moses told the king.

"I will not let the people go and Moses, you are in trouble."

Over and over Moses returned until at last the king learned how powerful God was. "Take the people and leave. Never let me see you again," the king commanded.

At last God's people were free because Moses did not give up, but obeyed God rather than the powerful king.

PRAYER:

Thank You, God, for brave people like Moses, who love and serve You. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did Moses want the king to let the people go?
- If you had been Moses, what would you have done?
- Why did the king finally do what God wanted?
- What gave Moses the courage to disobey the king?





TO DO:

Talk with the children about the ways we trust God and the ways God helps us to be brave. We know God is dependable through his plan for morning to follow night, spring to follow winter, pear trees to have pears rather than apples, and cats to have kittens rather than kangaroos.

RUTH AND NAOMI

Ruth

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" Naomi prayed to God. Naomi and her husband and two sons had left Bethlehem because there was no food there. They went to live with strangers in Moab. There the two sons married girls from Moab, but now Naomi's husband and two sons were dead.

"I must return to Bethlehem," Naomi told her daughters, "for that is where my family is. They will care for me."

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" Ruth prayed to God. Ruth wanted to be with her mother-in-law.

"I shall go with you," she said. "I will help take care of you, because you are old and cannot work."

"No," Naomi replied, "this is your home and these are your people. God will take care of me."

"I will go with you wherever you go," Ruth repeated, "because your God is my God."

Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem. There Ruth worked in the fields, the fields that belonged to Boaz.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" Boaz prayed to God. He had seen Ruth working but she was not one of his people.

Boaz married Ruth, the stranger, and she became the great grandmother of King David, who, too, asked God, "What shall I do?"

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for hearing our prayers, for hearing us when we pray, "What shall I do?" Help us to love You and others. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What did Naomi pray?
- Who was Ruth?
- What do you like best about Ruth?

- Do you know that Jesus was in the family of King David?
- Do you remember when Jesus prayed, "What shall I do, God?"

TO DO:

Make a gift for an elderly person. Children enjoy drawing, painting with tempera paint, chalk, or fingerpaint. Some children enjoy string painting by thoroughly wetting string in tempera or shoe polish. Place the string between the folded paper and pull the string in and out and around the paper.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE FREE

Exodus 12

"Hurry, before the wicked king changes his mind!" Moses told the people.

"Where are we going?" the children asked their parents.

"We are leaving this land to be free," their parents replied.

"Where are we going?" the children asked again.

"We are going to a new land where we will live as God's people," their parents replied.

"Hurry!" Moses shouted. "Do not take anything. God will take care of us. Run for your lives before the Egyptians come."

The people did as Moses said. They did not have time to prepare any food to take on their long journey.

The people did as Moses said, but one boy thought, "There's no hurry and I am hungry. There may be no food where we are going."

The boy ran to the vineyard to pick some grapes to eat. He could see the people running out of the city, and he laughed. "Why hurry?" he thought, filling his mouth with green, juicy grapes.

Suddenly the boy stared and the grapes tasted sour in his mouth. He could see hundreds of Egyptians chasing the people on their horses.

Knowing a shortcut to the Red Sea, where the people were crossing, he ran as if his feet were bolts of lightning. If only he could reach the Sea before the soldiers!





"Oh, Lord, be with me," he prayed. The boy could see the people ahead. He could hear them praying as they ran. "Praise be to God!" he shouted, as he reached the people, his own people. "We are free! We are free!"

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for people who listen and learn from Your word in the Bible and in our hearts and teach us what to do. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Where were the people going?
- Why didn't the boy go with the others?
- If you had to leave your home and everything behind, how would you feel?
- What would you do?

TO DO:

Take a walk to enjoy being free in God's wonderful world. Tape the walk. Play back the tape and identify sounds in God's wonderful world.

FOOD FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Exodus 16

"I'm still hungry," the boy thought. His stomach growled as if to agree. "It's better, however, to be here and safe," he added, remembering the soldiers on their swift horses.

"I'm hungry," said another child, aloud. Now that the people were safely on the other side of the Red Sea, everyone was hungry. The people had left in such a hurry, they had no food.

"I'm hungry," everyone complained. They grumbled at Moses. "Moses, it's your fault. If you had not hurried us, we would have brought food. Now we have no food."

The boy remembered how close the soldiers had been to the people. "If we had not hurried, we would not be here," he said.

The people did not listen to the boy. "Why did you bring us into the desert, Moses? There is no food or water in the desert," they complained. "It would have been better for us to have died in Egypt."

Moses shook his head. "How quickly they forget," he thought.

"Trust God," Moses told the people. "God will send us food, bread in the morning, birds in the evening. Now I must go away to pray."

Moses left the people to talk with God. "God," Moses prayed, "you have brought us safely out of Egypt into this Promised Land and we thank you. We know that your plan is good for us and. . ."

"Moses, Moses," the boy ran shouting to where Moses was praying. "God has answered our prayer. There is food! There is food!"

Moses opened his eyes. The skies above were filled with quail, small birds, as Moses had promised the people, for Moses believed and trusted God's promise.

PRAYER:

Dear God, we know You are with us always, and You love and care for us. Help us to love and care for others. Thank You for food. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did the people grumble at Moses?
- Have you ever complained?
- From where does your food come?

TO DO:

Make cookies or popcorn to share with someone to show your love. If possible, take a trip to a farm.

BUILDING THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 35-40

"We will build a tabernacle together!" Moses told the people.

"What's a tabernacle?" one of the children asked.

"Shhh! Moses is talking. Listen and you will learn," said his mother.

Benjamin listened, as his mother said.

"It will take all of us to build the tabernacle. If you have gold or silver or cloth, or oil for the lamps, or spices for the incense, bring them to me. We will need all of them for the tabernacle," Moses continued.

Benjamin still wondered what a tabernacle was. Since he did not know, he wondered what he could bring. "Should I give my pet goat? What is a tabernacle?"





"Some of you have special gifts," Moses went on, "special work you can do. We will need that kind of offering, too." Then Moses sat down, as the people talked among themselves.

Benjamin was curious. Benjamin wanted to know, but he was afraid of Moses, the great leader of his people. "What is a tabernacle?" he continued to wonder. "Can I give my slingshot? What can I give to build the tabernacle?"

At last Benjamin could stand it no longer. No one saw him when he arose and quietly went to sit beside Moses. "Moses," he whispered. "what is a tabernacle?"

"Benjamin, I am glad you asked. A tabernacle is a special tent, a 'house' for God, where the people and God meet together."

Benjamin smiled and breathed a deep sigh. "Now I know what I can bring!"

Moses looked at the young boy. He certainly had no gold nor silver nor cloth nor oil nor spices. What could a boy Benjamin's age bring? Moses, however, did not have to ask, for Benjamin quickly added, "If God is there, I will bring God my songs and prayers, but most of all, my love!"

PRAYER:

Dear God, I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Thank You, God, for Your church. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is a tabernacle?
- What would you call God's 'house'?
- What did Benjamin bring God?
- What can you give God?

TO DO:

Cut the design of a church from a large piece of construction paper. Ask the child to fill the church with pre-cut people.



AT-ONE-MENT

Based on Leviticus 16:20-22

Mother was crying. "Why are you crying?" Karen asked her mother. Karen and her mother were sitting on a wooden bench facing the lake and surrounded by other people. It was not a crying time.

It was not a crying time because the minister, Karen's friend, was smiling and in his hand he held a bunch of balloons, yellow, red, green, pink, purple, and blue balloons.

It was not a crying time because the balloons bounced happily, as the wind blew them through the blue sky.

Karen's mother, however, was crying. "Why are you crying?" Karen asked her mother again.

The minister handed Karen's mother a blue balloon. He gave a yellow balloon to Karen. Mother began to write on her balloon, as Karen asked again, "Why are you crying?"

Mother put her arm around Karen. "Each of us is writing a worry, a problem that gives us pain, or something for which we are sorry, and ask God to forgive us. My problem is sad. People cry when they are sad."

The minister took Mother's blue balloon. He took back all of the balloons on which the people had been writing and said, "We give you our problems, God, and our wrongs and thank you for loving and forgiving us. Amen."

Suddenly the blue sky was filled with floating balloons, red, yellow, green, pink, purple, orange, and blue balloons.

It was not a crying time. It was a time for smiling, and Karen's mother smiled, as she watched her blue balloon float away.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Your love and forgiveness. We give You the problems we cannot solve and ask You to give us strength to solve the ones we can. Help us to know the difference. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been sad and asked God to help you be happy?
- Have you ever seen someone else who was sad and asked God to help them be happy?
- Why did Karen's mother smile at the end of the story?





TO DO:

Take a trip to the store to buy a balloon for each child. Let the child choose his or her own balloon and share the enjoyment in the choosing and in his or her sense of ownership.

"SAMUEL, SAMUEL"

I Samuel 3:1-10

"Samuel, Samuel," Eli called in an old, tired voice, for Eli was very old and very tired. "Samuel, Samuel, open the Temple door," Eli cried again. "It is morning and time to worship God." Eli was a priest in the Temple.

"Samuel, Samuel, light the lamp. It is getting dark," said Eli. Because Eli was so old, he needed a helper. Samuel was his helper.

"Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel had been sleeping when he heard his name cried. "Eli," he thought, "Eli needs my help."

Samuel quickly went to where Eli was sleeping. "Did you call?" he asked.

"I did not call, Samuel. Go to sleep." Eli was old and needed as much sleep as he could get.

Samuel returned to his mat and went to sleep.

"Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel heard his name called again. He wondered if Eli had called for him in his sleep. Perhaps Eli was dreaming. He must go and see.

"Eli, did you call my name?"

"Samuel, you are dreaming. Go to sleep, my son." Eli was old and tired and needed his sleep.

Samuel was puzzled and wondered what was happening, but he did as Eli said.

"Samuel, Samuel!" again Samuel ran to Eli.

"Samuel," old Eli spoke slowly, rising from his mat. "God is calling you."

"Thank you, Eli," said Samuel, for now he could answer God.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for people who help us know You and what You want us to do. Thank You for being with us always. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Who was Eli?
- Who was Samuel?
- Who was calling Samuel?
- How does God "speak" to us today?

TO DO:

Make a Bible bookmark for someone who is "old and tired." The child can paste a gummed sticker or paper cutout on a piece of cloth, felt, construction paper, fringed on one end.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

I Samuel 17

"He's as big as a bear, huge as a hippopotamus, loud as a lion. He's a giant, David. You won't believe your eyes."

David had just brought his brothers food from home, because David was too young to fight. His brothers were in the army and they had heard of Goliath, the giant. They had seen Goliath, as well, and they were afraid!

The whole Hebrew army, David's people, was afraid!

"He is covered with heavy armor and shines golden in the sun. His shield is as big as a table top and his spear is as tall as a tree. For forty days he has cried for one of the men to fight him," continued David's brothers. "If we can kill him, his people, our enemies, will be our servants. We could win without any harm coming to the others."

"I don't understand then. Why doesn't one of you fight Goliath?" David asked. "God is on our side."

"Wait until you see him for yourself," his brothers replied.

David did not have long to wait. "Where is he, brave Hebrews, who will fight Goliath?" roared the giant.

The men in the Hebrew army ran from Goliath.

"Who are you that one man can frighten the armies of the living God?" David asked his people.

The people became angry at David for scolding them for being afraid. They told Saul, the king, David's words and he sent for David.





"I will kill Goliath," David told the king.

"You are but a boy!" the king replied.

"I am a shepherd and when the lion or the beast takes a lamb from my flock, I go after him and fight him and take the lamb from his mouth and kill him. I will do the same, with God's help, to Goliath, for it is God who protects me from the bear and the lion and God will protect me from Goliath."

"Go then and take armor and sword," the king commanded the boy.

The armor and sword, however, were too heavy for David and he replied, "No." Instead David took his sling and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's bag.

"Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" Goliath roared.

"You come to me with sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of God and God will protect me," said David.

David was young and quick and brave. Before Goliath knew what had happened, David had put one of his stones in his sling and struck the giant and killed him, for David was young and brave and quick, but especially, David trusted God.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help us to be brave when we meet giant problems, as David did, for we know that You are with us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Who was Goliath?
- Describe Goliath.
- Why did David want to fight Goliath?
- What happened?
- What would you have done? Why?

TO DO:

Talk about shepherds and what shepherds did in David's time. David played a harp and wrote songs that are in the Bible, in the book called Psalms. Sing one of the songs the children have learned.

DAVID AND JONATHAN, BEST FRIENDS

I Samuel 20

"My father does not want me to see you anymore. We cannot be friends," Jonathan told his friend, David.

Jonathan was the son of King Saul. Because David had killed the giant, Goliath, Saul asked David to come and live with them. David and Jonathan became best friends, but now Saul was angry with David.

"But why is your father angry with me?" David asked. He did not want to lose his best friend.

"He is afraid that the people are beginning to love you more than they love him. He is jealous that they will want you to be king. He is afraid and angry."

"How angry, Jonathan?" David wanted to know.

"David, my father is so angry and afraid he may even try to kill you. I do not know but I have a plan," explained Jonathan. "Listen. Stay here and hide in the field. I will find out from my father what he is going to do. In three days I will come and shoot three arrows in the field. I will say to my servant, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I add, 'The arrows are on this side of you,' take them and come to me, because you will be safe. If, however, I say, 'The arrows are beyond you,' run, for it is not safe for you."

David hid in the fields as Jonathan suggested. On the third day, Saul, the king, missed David at his table and became angry again.

Jonathan quickly left the table to warn David, because David was his best friend. Shooting the arrow into the field, Jonathan cried, "The arrow is beyond you."

When the servant brought back the arrow, Jonathan gave him his bow and arrows and sent him back home.

"Jonathan," cried David, getting up from his hiding place.

"David," cried Jonathan.

The two friends hugged each other because they were best friends. The two friends cried together because they were best friends. The two friends were sad because they knew that they must now leave each other and they were best friends!

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for friends. Help us remember that a friend loves at all times. Amen.





FOR DISCUSSION:

- Do you have a friend?
- Name your best friend.
- Why is this person your best friend?
- Have you ever had to leave a friend?

TO DO:

Plan together with the child a gift, a treat, or a trip for the child and a friend.

ELISHA'S SURPRISE

II Kings 4:8-10

"A surprise? A surprise for me?" Elisha, a messenger of God, had heard that his friend had a surprise for him. Elisha was used to surprises. When you are God's messenger, there are many surprises.

"It's a happy surprise, Elisha!"

Elisha wondered what the surprise might be. Could it be a donkey to ride? Elisha had to walk many miles as he went from place to place telling the people about God.

Perhaps the surprise was a big, fat, yellow cheese to eat! Sometimes Elisha was very hungry. He had no wife to prepare food for him.

Perhaps the surprise was a new scroll to read! Elisha used his Bible, or scroll, every day to read and it was very old.

Perhaps the surprise was a party to enjoy! Elisha did not have a family. As a messenger of God, he had no home, but stayed wherever he was, in the homes of his friends.

Elisha walked faster. "What can the surprise be?" he thought again.

Elisha walked to the home of his friend, the Shunammite woman.

"Elisha! Elisha, I have a surprise for you!" she cried.

"I have heard and I have wondered," Elisha replied. "What is the surprise?"

The Shunammite woman took Elisha's hand. She took him to a new room that had been added to her house. "This is your room, Elisha, for as long as you live. It is your home!"

There was a table and a bed, a chair and a lamp, a real room of his own, a real home at last!

"Thank you, thank you, thank you, dear friend!"

Elisha sat in the new chair, a chair all of his own. He closed his eyes and prayed, "Thank You, God, for this good friend, who in her way is also Your messenger, a giver of Your love. Amen."

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for all of your messengers, people who share Your love. Help me, too, to share Your love with others. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What was Elisha's surprise?
- Why was he so happy?
- Why didn't Elisha have a home?
- Can you think of a surprise to do for someone?

TO DO:

Think together of possible surprises for someone, such as making cookies or taking a visit, taking someone to lunch or shopping. Give the child a surprise by doing what he or she suggests.



JEREMIAH'S TROUBLE

Jeremiah 38:1-13

"Jeremiah is brave!" said one of the men, listening to Jeremiah preach.

"Jeremiah is going to get in trouble," warned another, hearing what Jeremiah was saying.

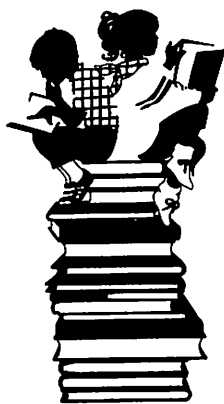
"It takes a brave man to stop people from fighting," the first man said.

"He says that God wants them to stop fighting and that he is God's messenger," said another man.

"Jeremiah is going to get into trouble," the man warned again.

That man was right. The rulers became angry. They put Jeremiah in a deep, deep well or pit in the ground. The pit was so deep Jeremiah could not get out.





"That will take care of Jeremiah," the rulers said, as they went back to their fighting.

"I knew that Jeremiah would get into trouble," the man said again.

What the man did not know, however, was that someone who knew the king saw Jeremiah put in the pit.

"O, great king," said Ebedmelech, "Jeremiah has been put into the pit to die. He is a brave man and God's messenger and does not deserve to die."

"You, too, are a brave man to come to me to save Jeremiah," the king praised Ebedmelech. "Go to the pit and pull Jeremiah from the pit and bring him here to me."

When the men saw Ebedmelech pull Jeremiah from the pit, the first man said, "Jeremiah is brave, as I said before."

"Jeremiah got in trouble, just as I said," said the other man.

Jeremiah overheard the two men talking. "I am a messenger of God. I expect trouble, but this time God has saved me to go on preaching his word."

"Jeremiah, you are a brave man," the man repeated, shaking his head.

"Jeremiah, you are going to get into trouble again," the other man repeated.

Jeremiah, the messenger of God, only smiled, as he walked down the road to his home.

PRAYER:

Dear God, as You saved Jeremiah from the pit, help us know Your love and care through people who love and care for us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did Jeremiah get into trouble?
- How did God help him?
- What does God want us to do?

TO DO:

Talk together about being brave. Bravery is an abstract term for children until they have seen models, heard stories, or experienced such bravery. Make a "peace" banner, using paper or cloth. Decorate it with "peace" pictures the children draw.



DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

Daniel

"Grandfather, why are they killing our people?" Timothy asked.

"We are Christians, Timothy. There is only one God, the God of Jesus the Christ."

"Why do they want to kill us for being Christian?" Timothy was afraid.

"These people worship a man, a king, who wishes to be worshiped as God. We cannot worship a man and the king is angry," Timothy's grandfather explained.

"I am afraid," Timothy told his grandfather.

"To be afraid is a natural feeling, just as love and courage and anger. It is all right to be afraid," said his grandfather. "Let me tell you a story of a brave man called Daniel."

"Daniel is not worshiping the king," the king's spies reported.

"He will get in trouble. Everyone must worship the king. I will tell the king!"

"You do not have to," said his friend, "because I have already told the king and the king has placed Daniel in the lion's den because he worships God."

"That's what those Hebrews deserve!" The two men, not knowing Daniel's courage and trust in God, began to gloat.

They had no sooner said the words, however, when one of their friends came running down the road. "Have you heard! Have you heard! Daniel's God has closed the mouths of the lions. The lions will not touch Daniel. Come and see for yourself."

The three men returned to the lion's den. It was true! Before their very eyes they saw Daniel sitting among the lions, as if they were kittens.

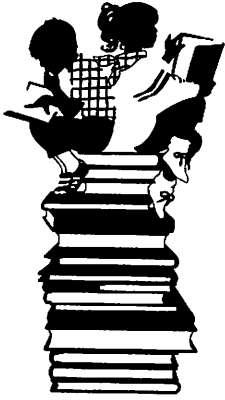
"Daniel, who is this God you worship?" they asked in amazement.

Daniel replied, "My God is the Creator of all that is. My God loves and takes care of me."

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for loving and taking care of me through people who love and care. Help me to be brave when I am afraid, for I know You are with me. Amen.





FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been afraid?
- What did you do?
- Is it all right to be afraid?
- What do you like best about the story of Daniel in the lion's den?

TO DO:

The Daniel story, as other miracle stories, presents problems for the biblical storyteller of young children. Because young children are "magical" thinkers, they accept these stories, as they are told. The miracle stories are stories written to give strength and courage and hope and trust.

This strength, courage, hope and trust comes to us through stories that say, "God can do all things. Be not afraid. Daniel trusted, and God met his needs."

As Christians we agree. Symbolically God gives us strength, courage, hope and happiness, when we trust God. Yet as an adult, and I believe this is true as well for adults who accept this story as literally true, I would not step into a lion's cage in order to prove God's love and protection or my faith.

God is God. God does miracles, not magic, for God works through such miracles of love and people and the laws of nature in ways that we may trust God's dependability.

Just as Daniel did not fear the jaws of the lion, Christians do not fear the "jaws" of death. They do not, however, intentionally destroy life, because it is a gift of God to be used to God's glory.

The question that presents itself to us is how children who hear the story will respond. Will the child, because he/she trusts God as Daniel did, put his/her hand in the lion's cage, or is there something innate, intuitive, within all persons, young children included, that recognizes these stories as religious stories, stories of the faith, that help our faith grow, thus enabling us to cope with and enjoy life more abundantly?

If the question cannot be answered satisfactorily either way, are there other stories that would be more helpful in guiding young children in their Christian growth, or is this story part of the foundation or tradition of the faith, and when should it be told?

A storyteller must be comfortable with the story, believe the story has something important to say to the audience, and be "his" or "her" story. Given the above, the teller must decide for him/herself if and when he/she will tell the story.

GOD LOVES US ALL

Based on the Book of Jonah

Alan grabbed the block from Karen's hand. "It's mine. I'm building!"

"You're mean. God doesn't love you! God doesn't love bad boys!" Karen shouted.

"I'm not a bad boy," Alan replied. "God loves everyone!"

Karen began to cry. Karen wanted to have her own way. Besides, she knew she was right. Grandmother had always told her that when she was bad, God would not love her.

Karen's teacher put her arms around Karen to comfort her. "I love you, Karen. I want you to be happy."

"Alan is mean. He took my block. I hate Alan. God hates Alan," Karen sobbed.

"You are angry at Alan," Mrs. Anderson agreed, "and you have a good reason. You did not like what Alan did. Sometimes God does not like what Alan does, but God always loves Alan, as God always loves you."

PRAYER:

Dear God, help us love one another. Thank You for loving us always. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been angry at someone?
- What did you do?
- Does God love you?
- Does God love the people who make you angry or who hurt you?
- How do we know God always loves us?

TO DO:

Talk about and compose a litany. Ask children to suggest things that make him or her glad, add "Thank You, God."



NEW TESTAMENT

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Luke 2:1-20

Clop! Clop! Clop! The donkey's hooves clopped over the stones of the path.

"He-haw! He-haw!" brayed the donkey. The donkey was tired, too. She had come a long way.

At last they reached the little town of Bethlehem.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Joseph knocked on the door of the inn.

"Go away. There is no room! There is no place to stay here!"

Joseph was tired. He had come a long way. Over and over he was told, "Go away. There is no room. Here there is no place to stay!"

The woman was tired. She had come a long way. "Could we stay with the animals in the barn?" Mary asked Joseph.

In the barn there was a place to stay, and it was warm.

Run! Run! Run! The barn door opened. Shepherds with their sheep stood at the door under the starlight.

"We have heard of the baby who was born this night." The shepherds kneeled beside the manger. They had come a long way to see this newborn baby in the hay.

"Shh! Shh! Shh! The baby is sleeping. Soon the sun will shine upon the very first Christmas day, Jesus' birthday.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Christmas and Jesus and love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why do we celebrate Christmas?





- What do you like best about Christmas?
- Do you know why we give gifts at Christmas?

TO DO:

Let the children unwrap the creche and display it. Read the story of the first Christmas from the Bible, Luke 2:1-20.

THE BABY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Luke 2:22-40

"Waah! Waah!"

"Shhh!" Mary whispered to Jesus, as she rocked him in her arms.

"God loves you! God loves you!" she sang to her baby, as she walked up the steps to the Temple with Joseph.

Mary was so busy with Jesus that she did not see the old man until he spoke.

"Thank you, God!" he exclaimed.

Mary looked up in surprise. It was Simeon, a very wise and important man at the Temple.

"I did not see you," Mary murmured.

"May I hold the baby?" Simeon asked. Simeon took Jesus in his arms. He closed his eyes. He prayed, "Now I can die in peace. I have seen your plan for all people in this special baby, in this child called Jesus."

Simeon opened his eyes and smiled at Mary, as he returned her baby to her arms. "God bless you, Mary," Simeon said. "God bless you, Joseph. God bless you, Jesus."

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for babies and new life, especially for the baby Jesus, who grew to do Your will and show us Your love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Who was Simeon?
- What did Simeon do?
- How do you think Mary felt when Simeon prayed aloud to God about her baby?

- What did Simeon say?
- What do you think Mary thought?

TO DO:

Visit the church nursery and see how the babies are loved because the church cares for them.

THE BOY JESUS AND THE TEACHERS

Luke 2:41-52

"Alleluia! Alleluia!" Jesus jumped up and down, clapping his hands and shouting with happiness. "There it is! I see the Temple! I see the Temple of Jerusalem!"

It was Jesus' first trip to Jerusalem, the most important city in this land, the city of King David.

"The Temple! The Temple!" Jesus continued to shout, running back to Mary and Joseph, who were far behind, and then ahead to the hill, where he could see the Temple.

It was Jesus' first trip to the Temple, the house of God, the Temple King Solomon had built.

"Let us pray," Joseph said quietly, coming up behind Jesus putting his hand on Jesus' shoulder to quiet him.

Mary, Jesus, and Joseph knelt on the hill overlooking Jerusalem. There they thanked God for His care and His presence.

When Joseph finished praying, Jesus asked, "May we go to the Temple now? There is so much to learn!"

Joseph nodded his head and Jesus ran ahead.

It was late that afternoon when Mary and Joseph found Jesus with the teachers of the Temple, talking and listening.

"What does God want me to do?" Jesus asked the rabbis.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

"And a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,'" Jesus added.





The priests and rabbis looked at Jesus with surprise. They were amazed at his answer.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for churches where we can ask questions and learn about Your love and care. Thank You for Jesus who loved and served You. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What does Alleluia mean?
- What is a temple?
- Can you think of a building which we call the "house of God" today?
- Where does God live?
- Do you and your family pray?
- Speak a spontaneous prayer and ask the children to say aloud their prayer.

TO DO:

Look through the curriculum in the church library and talk about what you see there. Take a tour through the church. Ask the minister or priest to answer questions.

JESUS READS THE BIBLE

Luke 4:16-22

"God has sent me to bring you good news." The tall man walked to the front of the synagogue and unrolled the scroll which was handed to him, as he said the words from memory.

As a boy he had memorized, learned by heart, the entire book of Isaiah. Now he stood in front, reading the words of Isaiah, the messenger of God, to the people for Jesus, too, was a messenger of God, a very special messenger.

"I will bring good news to the poor and to the lonely that God loves them, to the blind and to the sick that God wants them to be whole and well, to those who feel unloved and unfree that God loves and makes them free, and to those who think they can't but can, because God loves them."

The people stared at Jesus, as he returned the scroll to the attendant and sat down.

"Today these words of Scripture have happened in your hearing," Jesus added, as the people began to whisper and wonder who Jesus was.

PRAYER:

Thank You, God, for the Bible that helps us know the story of Your love for all people. Thank You for the people who tell us this story. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Open the Bible to the book of Isaiah, showing it and asking, "Who was Isaiah? What did he write?"
- What is a synagogue?
- What does Scripture mean?
- What is a scroll?
- What is the good news God sent Jesus to bring?

TO DO:

Make scrolls using dowel sticks (smaller scrolls can be made with paste sticks) and paper. Have precut mimeographed words from the Bible for the children to paste on the scrolls. If children can write, ask them to write their own words. Possible verses could include: "God is love," "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," "God is good."

JESUS' FRIENDS, THE FISHERMEN

Luke 5:1-11

"One more try!" Andrew told his brother, Peter.

"We have fished all night. I am tired. Let us pull in the net and row to shore," Peter, the big fisherman, replied.

As they came toward the shore, a man called to them, "May I use your boat?"

Peter shook his head, as he whispered to his brother, "Andrew, I am tired. Let us go home."

"We can let him use our boat for a little while," Andrew argued.

The man stepped into the boat and began to teach the people. When he was tired, he turned to the fisherman, Andrew, saying, "Row out into the deep water and put down your net to fish."





"We have fished all night and we have caught nothing. It is late and we are tired," Peter replied.

The man looked at Peter, but did not say a word.

"If you insist." Peter began to row the small boat.

The two fishermen again dropped their net into the water. To their surprise the net became full of squirming fish. "What a catch!" shouted Peter and Andrew, pulling in the net.

"Come, follow me, and be my helpers and I will make you fishers of men." The men looked at Jesus with amazement. Without a word, Peter and Andrew rowed to shore. They sold their fish and from that day they followed the man called Jesus.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me follow Jesus in the way I love and help others. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What did Jesus ask the fishermen for?
- What happened when they put their net in the water as Jesus suggested?
- After they caught a net full of fish, what did Jesus ask them to do?

TO DO:

Cut paper fish in different colors. Attach a paper clip to each fish. Make fishing poles with a pole and string and a magnet attached to the end of the string. The child will enjoy creating his or her own boat and fishing.

THE LAME MAN

Luke 5:17-26

Show me what it means to be "lame." Now show me what it means to be able to "walk and run," "climb and jump." Whenever you hear those words in the story, do the actions wherever you are. Be "sad" and "happy" as indicated in the story, or use "happy" and "sad" puppet paper plate faces.

"I wish I could *walk* as you do," the lame man said to his first friend. The lame man had never *walked*.

"I wish I could *run* as you do," the lame man said to his second friend. The lame man had never *run*.

"I wish I could *climb* as you do," the lame man said to his third friend. The lame man had never *climbed*.

"I wish I could *jump* as you do," the lame man said to his fourth friend. The lame man had never *jumped*.

The lame man had never *walked*, *run*, *climbed*, nor *jumped*, for he was lame.

It was *sad* not to be able to *walk* or *run* or *climb* or *jump* but the lame man was not *sad*. He was *happy* because the lame man had 1,2,3,4 friends!

One day the four friends were very *happy*. "We have seen Jesus help a sick man. He can help you, too!" they cried.

The lame man was *happy*. Then suddenly he became *sad*. "How will I get to see Jesus? I cannot *walk*."

The four friends were not *sad*. They were *happy*. "We will carry you," they said.

The four friends carried the lame man on a blanket, but when they reached the house where Jesus was teaching, they were *sad*. "There are too many people. We can never get inside to see Jesus!" they cried.

The lame man was *sad*, too, because he believed that Jesus could help him.

Suddenly one of the friends cried, "We will make a hole in the roof of the house and lower the lame man into the house on his blanket!"

The lame man was *happy* again.

When Jesus saw the blanket being lowered into the room and the lame man sitting on it, he was surprised. "Why are you here?" he asked.

"I believe you can help me *walk* and *run* and *climb* and *jump*," the lame man replied.

"Because you believe, it is so. Take up your blanket and *walk*." Jesus held out his hand to help the man.

The lame man stood up. He *walked*! He *ran*! He *climbed*! He *jumped*!

The lame man was *happy* because he had 1,2,3,4,5 friends, and his last friend was Jesus!

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Jesus, who is our friend. Thank You for helping lame people and lonely people and all people who need and know Your love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why was the lame man sad?





- What happened?
- Was Jesus a good friend?
- How does Jesus help us know God?

TO DO:

Ask the children to name their friends aloud. Encourage them to include adults, animal pets, and special toys that are meaningful to them, such as stuffed animals and dolls. Plan a special entertainment treat for friends.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37

"Help! Help! Help!" the man cried in the dark. There was no one to hear the man cry, however, as the robbers jumped from behind a rock, beat the man, took his money, and ran away.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" the man groaned in the dark, but there was no one to hear the man.

"Step! Step! Step!" the man listened to the steps coming closer in the dark, but soon the steps sounded far away. The walking man passed by and did not stop to help the hurt man.

"A light! A light!" the man moaned with joy. The light came closer...closer...closer...and then it moved to the other side of the road and on down the road.

"Clop! Clop! Clop!" the hurt man heard the donkey's hooves on the road. "He will not see me. He will pass by as the other two," the hurt man thought, sadly.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" cried a voice in the dark. "This man is hurt. Here, let me help you."

The hurt man looked up in the dark and by the light of the lamp saw his helper's face. It was a Samaritan, and the Samaritans were his enemies!

"Let me clean your wounds," the good Samaritan said, as he wrapped the hurt man's head. He put the hurt man on the back of his donkey and took him to the nearest inn.

"Here is money to take care of the hurt man until he is well. I will return soon and pay whatever else is needed."

And the Good Samaritan went on his way.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for people like the good Samaritan. Help us to help others as the good Samaritan did. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Do you know where this story is written?
- Can you guess who told this story?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?
- What would you have done if you had been there?
- What would you do if you saw someone hurt, or lonely, or sad?

TO DO:

From old storypapers or curriculum, cut out pictures that illustrate the story of the Good Samaritan. Paste a piece of felt or flannel on the back. Cover a large board or heavy cardboard with flannel and let the child place the figures on the board as you retell the story. Commercial figures of the story can be purchased in bookstores selling religious materials.

MARY AND MARTHA

Luke 10:38-42

"I am lonely," Jesus thought one day, while he was teaching a crowd of people. Even though he was with a crowd of people, Jesus suddenly felt lonely.

"I will visit my two good friends, Mary and Martha," he decided, as he waved good-bye to the people returning to their homes.

"Jesus! Jesus! How good it is to see you again!" the sisters exclaimed. "Sit down and rest. We will wash your feet and you must eat with us and stay here the night."

It was good to be with loving friends and Jesus thanked them.

One of the sisters worked hard preparing Jesus' meal. The other sister talked and listened to Jesus.

Jesus thanked God for his loving friends.





PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for good friends who show Your love and for Jesus who taught us Your care for all people. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been lonely?
- Why was Jesus lonely in a crowd of people?
- One of the sisters worked and one talked with Jesus.
Which sister would you choose to be? Why?

TO DO:

Invite guests and ask children to plan, prepare and set the table, polishing silverware and straightening their room.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Luke 11:5-9

Knock! Knock! "Wake up! I say wake up! I have been walking all night and I am tired and hungry! (more knocking) Wake up!"

"Go away," cried a voice from within the house. The voice was sleepy. The voice was angry. "You will awaken my family!"

"I am a guest," said the man outside. "You know our custom. A guest always receives the best!"

"Not today. My son is ill and my wife baked only one loaf of bread. It has been eaten," the man inside the house explained. "We need our sleep, and we have no food, so please go away."

"I am hungry!" cried the man in the dark in the middle of the night.

"Go away," he cried again. "It is late!"

"I am a stranger," he tried again.

"Go away! I say, go away."

"I am a guest," the man repeated.

"One more time I will tell you to go away!"

"I am a child of God. . ."

"I am coming!" the man cried from within. "I am coming. I will go next door and get you some food. Come in! Come in!"

PRAYER:

Dear God, give us this day our daily bread. Thank You for the food by which we are fed. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did the man outside keep knocking?
- Why did the man inside finally get up and invite the other to come inside?
- Why do you think this story is in the Bible?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?
- Are all of Jesus' stories about God?

TO DO:

Cut out two pictures of men. Paste each figure to a paste stick, tongue depressor, straw or twig to be used as a puppet. A puppet, however, can be anything: a pencil, brush, stuffed animal, ice cream scoop, finger, etc.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Luke 15:4-6

"I have lost a sheep! When I came to the hills this morning I had one hundred sheep. Now one of them is missing!" The shepherd was worried. Every day he came to the hills so the sheep could eat the green grass and drink from the bubbling brook.

"One hundred sheep and one of them is missing, but it doesn't matter. I have ninety-nine sheep," the shepherd thought. However, he was not happy. "Even one sheep is important," he continued.

Again he counted his sheep. "Something may happen to the lost sheep, but something might happen to the ninety-nine if I go look for the one lost sheep."

The shepherd continued to think about the one lost lamb. At last he took the ninety-nine sheep home and returned to the hills to look for the lost lamb.

The shepherd searched and searched for the one lost lamb. He called and called for the one lost lamb. "I will find the lamb!" he said.





It was getting very late and the shepherd was hungry.

It was very dark and the shepherd was worried.

The shepherd hunted throughout the hills, high and low, calling for his lost sheep.

At last he heard "Baaaaah!"

The shepherd ran to the sound. He smiled, and put the sheep on his shoulder and returned home. "One, two, three. . . ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred!"

"Come and celebrate with me. I had lost a lamb and now I have found it!" the good shepherd called to his friends.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for caring for us as the good shepherd in the story cared for one lost lamb. Thank You for being with us and for hearing us wherever we are. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- How many sheep did the shepherd have?
- Why did he take them to the hills?
- What happened when he counted them?
- What did the shepherd do when he found one of them missing?
- What would you have done?
- How did the shepherd feel?
- Why did the shepherd celebrate when he found the lost lamb?
- Why did Jesus tell this story?

TO DO:

Using a rotary beater, whip one cup soap flakes, three tablespoons liquid starch or warm water until they are the consistency of whipped cream. Fingerprint clouds and wooley sheep or whatever.

THE LOST COIN

Luke 15:8-9

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine..." the woman counted her coins.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. . ." she counted her coins again. "Oh, no, one of my coins is missing!" she groaned.

"You have nine other coins," said her friend.

"I must find the one I lost," she replied.

The woman swept her house but she could not find the lost coin. The woman looked under her bed but she could not find the lost coin. The woman looked through all of her pockets but she could not find the lost coin.

"Oh dear, oh, dear," the woman cried, wringing her hands. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"You have done everything that can be done. Stop looking and enjoy the other nine coins," said her neighbor and friend.

"I cannot stop looking until I have found the lost coin," the woman replied. She stopped wringing her hands and went back to looking.

She looked and looked and would not stop to eat or rest. "Here it is!" she cried at last. "I have found it! I knew I could find it! Celebrate with me! I have found my lost coin!" the woman cried with great joy.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for giving us eyes to help us see, minds to help us think, and courage and hope to help us do. We thank You for Your love and plan for each of us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever lost anything, a shoe, a book, a toy, a piece of paper?
- How did you feel?
- What did you do?
- Why was the woman upset about losing a coin?
- What did she do?
- Why didn't she give up?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?





TO DO:

Hide a dime, quarter, or half-dollar. Give each child an opportunity to find the coin. Celebrate by visiting an ice cream parlor. Enjoy the companionship of the children during the story, the prayer, the game, and the celebration.

THE LOVING FATHER

Luke 15:11-32

There was once a man who had two sons, two boys. He loved his sons. One day one of the sons came to him and said, "I want to leave home. Give me my share of land and money."

"I will miss you," the father replied. "I love you."

The son shook his head and said, "I want to go."

"I need you here. I need your help," the father said.

The son shook his head again and said, "I will go."

The son took his money and went away. He had fun and spent all of his money| having fun. | When the money was gone, his new friends were gone, too.

Now he had nowhere to live and nothing to eat. "I cannot go home. My father| would never forgive me."

The boy became more lonely and miserable. "I could never be my father's son, but I could be his servant. I will tell him I am sorry."

It was a long walk home. The closer he came, the more he worried.

"What if he will not see me?" thought the boy who was lonely.

"What if he is angry?" thought the boy who was afraid.

"What if he is sick or dead?" thought the boy who was sad.

The boy was so busy thinking, he did not see his father running down the road towards him. "My son! My son!| You have come home!"

"Father, I am sorry!" he cried, hugging his father. "Will you forgive me and let me be your servant?"

"You are my son. You will always be my son. I forgive you because I love you."

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Your love and forgiveness, for Jesus Your son, and for the stories Jesus told. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did Jesus tell this story?
- Who is the loving father like?
- Who is the son like?
- Why does God forgive us?
- Why does God love us?

TO DO:

Help the child think of a gift for her/his father or parent. Painting or drawing a picture, giving a hug, or helping are possible "gifts." Explore other ways to say, "I love you."

TEN SICK MEN

Luke 17:11-19

"Jesus, help us!" called the men from a distance. Jesus had been talking with God in his thoughts and did not see the men.

"Jesus, help us!" they called again.

Jesus was surprised that they knew his name. As he saw the men, he counted, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten." There were ten sick men.

"Go to the priests and show yourselves." The ten men looked at Jesus. Then they did as he said but some of them were strangers. "How can I go to your priests? God will not cure me. I am not one of God's people."

"God loves all people. Trust God and your faith will cure you."

The man went with the others and as they went, they were cured.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten men were made well again. "Look!" cried the stranger. "Thank God, we are well!" The man turned and ran back to where he had seen Jesus. The man fell on his knees.

"Thank you! Thank you!" he cried.

"You are the stranger. Where are the other nine men that were made well?" Jesus asked.





One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten men were healed, but only one of them thanked Jesus, the Healer.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for the life You have given us. Thank You for love and good health. Thank You for Jesus who showed us Your love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- How many sick men wanted Jesus' help?
- What happened?
- The man who returned to thank Jesus was a Samaritan, a stranger, whom many of Jesus' people feared and hated, and yet in Jesus' story it was the Samaritan who had faith. Why do you think Jesus told this story?
- If you had been one of the ten men, what would you have done?

TO DO:

Take a walk, jog, or run with the children, talking about the importance of eating good food, exercising, and getting enough sleep.

THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE

Luke 18:10-14

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" moaned the man, stumbling into the church. The man fell to his knees and closed his eyes. "Forgive me, God. I didn't mean to do it. I am sorry to be so selfish," prayed Mr. Small.

He was not alone in the church. A rich man proudly walked down the aisle and seeing the other man thought, "What is he doing here? His clothes are dirty and his hair is long. He doesn't belong in my church!"

Mr. Big made a face and frowned, as he went back to the front of the church to pray. "God, I thank you that I am not like this poor man," Mr. Big prayed. "I give a great deal of money to the church and tell the preacher what I like."

At the back of the church Mr. Small, knowing that all he had came from God, put his head in his hands and cried again, "Forgive me, God, for not loving you and others as much as I should. Thank You for Your love and forgiveness."

When Mr. Big left the church, he could not see Mr. Small. "He must have known that he did not belong here," he thought.

Mr. Small, however, had not left the church. Mr. Big could not see Mr. Small because Mr. Small was still on his knees, talking with God.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for hearing us when we talk with You. Thank You for loving all people. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- In the Bible Mr. Small is called a "publican" and Mr. Big is called a "pharisee." In this story why was the first man called Mr. Small?
- Why was the second man in the story called Mr. Big?
- Do you think they meant the size of the man?
- Does God love all people, people who feel small and people who feel big?

TO DO:

Cut out pictures of two men and paste them to tongue depressors or paste sticks. Retell the story using the "puppets."

ZACCHAEUS

Luke 19:1-10

"I wish I weren't so small!" The little man looked at the crowd of people. He had always been small.

Because he was small, however, he made up for it in thinking big. The little man was a big thinker. "How can I see through this crowd of people? I may be small but I can think big!"

The little man thought and thought. "I know! I will climb a tree!"

Quickly the little man climbed the tree. Now he could see! Now he could see Jesus!

Jesus looked up into the tree and saw the little man. "Come down," he said. "I will eat with you."

"Me?" asked the little man.

"Yes, I will be your friend."

Jesus and the little man talked all that afternoon. "God loves you," Jesus told him.





"Me?" asked the little man.

"Yes, you, and I will be your friend."

"I am so small."

"God loves you. God loves everyone," Jesus explained.

When Jesus left the little man, the little man called to the people. "Forgive me. I have not loved you. Now I know what love is," he said.

The people looked at the little man. They were not sure.

"It's true," said Zacchaeus. "God loves everyone, even me!"

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for big people and small people, old people and young people and for Your love for all of them. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you felt "small"?
- How did Zacchaeus feel about being small?
- How was Zacchaeus big?
- Why did he tell the people he was sorry?
- Does God love you?

TO DO:

Take a walk, asking the children to choose a stick to use as a "tree." Use plasticine clay purchased in variety stores and soften it by rolling it with your hands. Use a small amount as a base to hold the tree. Mold a small man (body and head) and place in the tree as Zacchaeus. If you wish, the child can make other figures for the story.

JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

Mark 10:13-16

"Will we see Jesus soon?" Jared asked his mother.

"Yes." She smiled, for Jared and his mother had been looking forward to seeing Jesus for a long, long, time.

"Jared, see the fat white clouds!" Mother said. "How happy God must be!"

Jared, however, was too busy thinking, "Soon I will see Jesus!"

"Jared look at the field of red flowers!" Mother said. "How pleased God must be!"

Jared, however, was too busy thinking, "Soon I will see Jesus!"

They were almost there! Yes, there ahead on the hill was a crowd of people. Jared ran ahead. "I want to see Jesus," he called.

The people, however, were crowded around Jesus and Jared could not see.

"I want to see Jesus," Jared cried.

The people were so busy listening, they did not hear Jared.

"I must see Jesus!" Jared shouted. Jared had waited so long to see Jesus. Jared had wanted so much to see Jesus. Jared pushed through the crowd of people to see Jesus.

Suddenly Jared felt the strong arms stop him. He felt the strong arms lift him in the air. He saw the strong man's angry face. "Jesus is busy!" the man said.

Jared was frightened and Jared was sad. Then he heard, "Let the children come to me!"

Jared felt his feet on the ground again and he ran as fast as he could toward the man called Jesus. Jesus took Jared on his lap and hugged him.

Mother, too, had just come through the crowd and saw Jared on Jesus' lap. How happy was Jared! How glad was Mother! How pleased was God!

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for Jesus who told and showed us Your love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Show me with your face how you think Jared felt on his way to see Jesus.
- Show me now how you think Jared felt when the strong man lifted him and said, "Jesus is too busy!"
- Show me how you think Jared felt when Jesus said, "Let the children come to me!"

TO DO:

Make a mural with one or many children. Cut out a picture of Jesus and ask the children to cut out pictures of children. Draw a circle around the figures for young children to cut by. Paste the pictures to a long strip of paper.





A line to follow will avoid frustration for children who are just beginning to learn to use scissors.

GOD CARES FOR THE BIRDS

Matthew 6:25-33

"See the birds!" Small blue birds were pecking on pieces of grain that had fallen to the ground. When the birds had eaten the grain, they spread their lovely blue wings and soared into the sky. One of the birds stayed on the ground, drinking water from a small puddle of rain. Suddenly the bird stopped drinking and quickly hopped over to a small worm. The bird picked up the worm in its beak and flew to the nest it had made in the tree.

The children could see the heads of three baby birds, their mouths open and ready for their breakfast.

"See the birds!" he repeated. "They do not plant the seeds nor prepare the food. Yet God, your Father, has planned for them because He cares for His creatures. How much more He cares for you."

"May I sit on your lap?" a boy asked the teacher.

The teacher smiled and lifted the boy to his lap, as a girl brought him two wild, yellow flowers. "Look at the flowers," said the man. "Nothing is more beautiful than a flower. How lovely they are. Yet they do nothing but grow. Neither the birds nor the flowers worry about what they will eat nor what they will wear. God plans for the sun and the rain to help them grow."

"Look, the baby bird is trying to fly," cried the boy on the teacher's lap. "Who taught the bird to fly?"

"God gave the birds instinct, which means a bird is born knowing how to fly when it is ready," the teacher replied.

"There's a new flower growing," the girl said, pointing to a tiny red bud just beginning to open, "What makes a flower grow?"

"God has planned life within the seed, so that the flower will grow when it is time. God has made everything beautiful in its time."

The children smiled at the teacher who loved them.

"If God cares for the birds and the flowers, how much He cares for you, His children," said Jesus, the teacher and the friend of all children,

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for the birds and flowers and for Your care for them and for all of us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is 'instinct'?
- How does a bird make a nest?
- How does it learn to make a nest?
- What makes a flower grow?

TO DO:

Take a walk, looking for birds and watch their activities. Observe the flowers and appreciate their beauty with conversation and song.

THE FEEDING

Matthew 14:15-21

"I'm hungry," said one of the children.

"Shhh! Jesus is talking," warned his mother.

Suddenly his stomach began to make growling noises. "I'm hungry," he whispered again.

"Shhh!" his mother repeated.

This time, however, Jesus heard and stopped talking. He looked up at the sky. "It is late. The people are hungry," Jesus said to his friends. "Is there food to feed the people?"

"We did not know the people would stay so long," the disciples explained to Jesus. "There is a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish."

"Bring them to me, please," Jesus said.

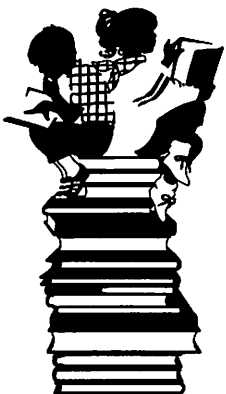
Jesus took the boy's food and blessed and broke and shared it with all of the people and the hungry were filled.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for our bread, the food which we are daily fed, for all the hands that plant the seed, and all who help so we can eat. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been hungry?
- Are there people who are hungry?





- What can we do to help the people who are hungry?

TO DO:

If you tell the story around Thanksgiving, contribute to the many organizations that collect food and money to share with others, especially the church. Many churches have food gathering and distribution throughout the year, because the need for food is present at all times.

THE TWO SONS

Matthew 21:28-32

"The vines need cutting and the grapes need picking," the father said to his son one day. "I need your help."

"I'm sorry, Father. I can't help you today. I don't feel very well," the son replied.

The father found his second son. "I need your help in the garden today. Will you come and help me?"

"Yes," the son replied, "I will help you."

The father went to the garden to work. When he reached the garden, no one was there.

He began to work but his son did not come as he had promised. "I wonder where he is. He said that he would come," thought the father.

It was getting hot in the garden and the father was tired. He stopped to rest and to his pleasure, when he looked up, he saw his son coming up the path.

"Father, I knew you needed my help, so I came. I don't feel as sick as I thought I did," the boy explained to his father because he loved him.

"But where is your brother who promised to come?" his father asked.

"I do not know but I saw him earlier with a friend."

All afternoon the father and the son who had said "no" but did as his father asked because he loved him, worked in the hot sun. All afternoon the father wondered why the son who had said "yes" never came to help his father.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for people who help one another in love. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did the first son say "no" to his father?
- Why did the other son say "yes"?
- Why did the first son change his mind and help his father?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?

TO DO:

Find a worthwhile job for your child to do, such as sweeping, making a bed, taking out trash, feeding a pet, etc. Talk about families and the church working together.

THE FIRST PALM SUNDAY

Mark 11:1-10

Jesus enters Jerusalem and is welcomed. "Hosanna! Hosanna!"

Jesus heard the children shouting.

"Hosanna! Hosanna!"

Jesus heard the people singing.

He saw the palm branches they were waving, welcoming him to the city. Oh, how he loved the children! How he loved all people!

The animal on which Jesus sat moved slowly down the road toward Jerusalem, while the people celebrated Jesus' coming to the city.

"Mother, why is Jesus smiling?" asked a child, standing by the roadside.

"He is happy. He knows the people love him."

"I love him," the child replied.

"Jesus loves you," said the mother.

It was the first "Palm Sunday." It was Jesus' happiest day. It was a day to celebrate!

PRAYER:

Dear God, as Christians everywhere celebrate Palm Sunday, remembering Jesus' love, hear our prayers of thanksgiving and praise for Your love in His name. Amen.





FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why was Jesus happy?
- What was happening?
- What makes you happy?
- Name the people you love.

TO DO:

Make palm leaves from green construction paper and march around the room, singing.

GOOD FRIDAY

Luke 22-23

"Jesus, the leaders do not like what you are preaching. Perhaps you should leave the city. You may be killed," his friends warned Jesus.

"I have work to do, God's work," Jesus replied.

As Jesus preached, the leaders became more angry at him and plotted to kill him. One of his twelve friends, whom Jesus trusted, even left him.

It was a dark week in Jerusalem.

Jesus knew that it was dangerous to stay, but he had made up his mind. He would stay. He had work to do, God's work.

One day the soldiers dragged Jesus before a judge. The people shouted, "He must die!"

The judge was afraid of the people.

On Friday of that dark, sad week, Jesus died.

His friends wept.

PRAYER:

Dear God, it makes us sad to lose a friend, someone or something we love. Comfort us, especially as we think about Jesus dying and forgive us as we think about how much we are like those unloving people who caused Jesus to die. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why would Jesus not leave the city when his friends warned him to go?
- What was God's work which Jesus was doing?
- What happened?
- What do we call that dark Friday Jesus died?
- Is it all right to cry when you are sad?

TO DO:

Talk about the emotion of sadness. The adult may begin by saying, "I feel sad when. . ." Ask the children what makes them sad.

EASTER SUNDAY

Matthew 28:1-10

"Jesus lives!" shouted Mary.

"Jesus lives?" asked her friend.

"Yes, I have just returned from the tomb where they placed his body. It is not there. Jesus lives!"

Mary was so excited with the good news, she ran from one house to another to tell Jesus' friends.

Jesus' friends, who were sad, wiped their eyes. "Are you sure, Mary?"

"I heard his voice. I saw him, and although he did not look the same, I could tell it was Jesus," she insisted.

Jesus' friends began to pray and praise God, to sing and to dance with great joy.

"Jesus lives!" they sang.

Ever since that first Easter, Jesus' friends continue to pray and praise God, to sing and to dance with great joy, for Jesus lives!

PRAYER:

Dear God, Hallelujah! Jesus lives! Yea, God! May all creation bless Your name. What a happy day! Amen.





FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why was Mary excited?
- What do you like best about Easter?
- How do you celebrate?

TO DO:

Take a walk, looking for signs of new life in God's world.

PETER AND THE FIRST CHURCH

Acts 2

"Teach me. I want to learn to be a teacher," Peter told Jesus, the good and wise teacher.

"Show me. I want to learn to be a helper and a healer," Peter asked Jesus, the kind and loving helper and healer.

"Lead me. I want to learn to be a preacher and to serve God," Peter said to Jesus, the great preacher, the son of God.

Peter listened and watched and learned. He was eager to be a teacher, a helper, and a preacher for God,

One day Peter was preaching to many people in one place. He remembered what Jesus had taught and shown him, but now Jesus was gone. It was up to Peter to take his place.

Peter knew, however, that he could not do all of Jesus' work alone. There was so much work to be done that Peter told the people about Jesus, what he had said and taught and done.

"Peter, we want to help, too. We want to follow Jesus," they said. "What can we do?"

"Thank you, God," Peter prayed. Then he said aloud, "Let us sing and pray together and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

Everyone sang their praises to God for Jesus and though they didn't know it, they were the very first "church."

PRAYER:

Thank You, God, for Jesus and Peter and all people who work for You inside and outside the church. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Who was Peter?
- What is a church?
- What do we do in church?

TO DO:

Visit the church when it is empty. Visit the minister in his office. Visit the organist and listen to the organ. Make church windows by cutting cellophane in different shapes and sizes (or small pieces of chipped crayons) and arrange on sheets of wax paper. Place a second sheet over the paper and press with a warm iron to seal the edges.

HELPING THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

Acts 11:27-30

"How can I help you? What can I do?" Sarah thought, as she sat beside her mother.

"The people in the church at Jerusalem need our help," said the men from the church at Antioch. "Tomorrow Paul and Barnabas will leave for Jerusalem. I ask each of you to pray and to share with the hungry, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Sarah watched her father gather from the fields the grain that he would share with the people who were hungry in Jerusalem.

"What can I share?" thought Sarah, watching her father wrap the grain.

"Husband," Sarah heard her mother say, "I have saved a few coins which I would like to share with the poor in the church at Jerusalem."

Sarah looked at her plate of cheese and bread, grapes and meat. Sarah was glad that she and her family had enough to eat. She was glad that she was not hungry. "But what can I share? How can I help? What can I do?" she wondered, as she looked at her plate filled with good food.

Later that night Sarah went with her father and mother to the church to bring the gifts they would share with the church at Jerusalem.

"Thank you," Paul said, as Sarah's father gave him the grain to share with the church at Jerusalem.

"Thank you," Paul said, as Sarah's mother gave him the coins to share with the church at Jerusalem.





"Thank you," Paul said to Sarah, as he took the cloth she handed him. Inside the cloth were cheese and grapes, bread and meat. . . Sarah's very own meal which she shared with the hungry in the church at Jerusalem.

PRAYER:

Thank You, God, for the good food You have planned for us to eat and to share with others. May we always remember to share with the hungry, the lonely and the unloved. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did Sarah want to help the people in the church at Jerusalem?
- If you had been there, what would you have given?
- If there were a church with hungry people that asked your church to help, what would you give?
- Because we have food, does God love us more than the people who are hungry?
- What does God expect us to do?

TO DO:

Talk with the children about the food-sharing project at your church. Most churches have ongoing opportunities for sharing food or clothing or money with others. Talk about the "offering."

If you wish to act out the story, hide pieces of real or plastic fruit and ask each child to find one piece. Divide the children into two groups, the people at Antioch and the people at Jerusalem. Ask the children to choose if they want to be the people who give the fruit or those who receive the fruit. Sit on opposite sides of the room. Give the fruit to the church at Antioch and retell the story, as the children act it out. Use a simple plot and be prepared for Antioch to be "hungry" when they have shared their food with Jerusalem. In most cases "Jerusalem" will be willing to share its food with "Antioch."

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